Meet Prof. Darunee Soorukram, Thieme Chemistry Journals Awardee 2024!

Prof. Darunee Soorukram *received her B.Sc. (1999) from Khon Kaen University (Thailand), her M.Sc. (2003) from Mahidol University (Thailand), and her Dr. rer. nat. in 2006 from Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (Germany). After a postdoctoral stay at Imperial College London (UK) from 2007 to 2009, she returned to Mahidol University (Thailand) as a Lecturer. She was promoted to Assistant Professor in 2013 and Associate Professor in 2017.*

Thieme: Which field of organic chemistry are you interested in the most and why?

Prof. Soorukram: I am fascinated by the art of organic synthesis, especially stereoselective transformations and total synthesis to construct chiral molecules and natural compounds. I became interested in organic synthesis during my master's studies and my interest increased gradually during my Ph.D. studies and postdoctoral training. I always enjoy learning how synthetic organic chemists proposed their retro-synthetic analysis and made their way to the targets. To me, it is an interesting combination between science and their own art (creativity).

Thieme: Following that, what is the focus of your current research activity?

Prof. Soorukram: Currently, the students in my lab are working on the development of practical asymmetric strategies to create chiral molecules, both natural and non-natural. The compounds of our interest at the moment are lignan natural products and chiral fluorine-containing molecules. We are expanding the potential use of our synthesized compounds by initiating collaboration with biologists.

Thieme: What do you think about the modern role and prospects of organic chemistry?

Prof. Soorukram: I believe that organic chemistry will still be the core chemical science for the advancement of science and technology. Based on organic chemistry principles dealing with chemical structures, it can give access to new structures and provide knowledge and information on the function and properties of the compounds, such as stability, chemical reactivity, and biological activity, which are very important to many other scientific disciplines and frontier research areas, including energy, environment, materials, biology and medicine.

Thieme: Which difficulties are there for young upcoming chemists in your field? Do you have any tips?

Prof. Soorukram: I believe that all of us, as chemists, encounter or struggle from a variety of difficulties at any stage of our research career. Even at the same stage of the career path, the difficulties also vary depending on where you are. For the young upcoming organic chemists, the general difficulties might be related to hunting for research grants, recruiting qualified students to the group, finding the way to get the projects done, and balancing between work and life. In addition to these difficulties, in Thailand, there are several common reagents in organic synthesis that we cannot purchase – *n*-BuLi is one of them! This makes organic synthesis even more challenging to us. Keep on working! That is my only tip.

Thieme: What is your most important scientific achievement to date and why?

Prof. Soorukram: In terms of scientific projects, each of the research projects that we were able to complete stand for an important scientific achievement to me and also to my students who were responsible for each project. When the lab work was done and the paper got accepted, I invited my students for dinner and the whole group celebrated it as our important scientific achievement in that time. It is therefore difficult for me to choose one of them. In addition to the completed projects, I think that another important achievement has been building up my research group that allows me to educate and train the young generation of organic chemists in Thailand.

Thieme: Could you tell us something about yourself outside the lab, such as your hobbies or extra-work interests?

Prof. Soorukram: I enjoy reading if it is only one or two free days. If I have more time, I enjoy driving to upcountry, and I love to visit quiet places and nature in Thailand. I prefer mountain more than beach. My favorite place of all time is Phu Kradueng National Park, a giant, heart-shaped, sandstone mountain in northeastern Thailand. It is just a perfect place to go to get fresh air and clear my mind.